

Testimony to the Human Services Committee

Senate Bill No. 843 - An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget
Recommendations Concerning Social Services

March 3, 2009

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and Committee Members,

My name is Sharon McCreven and I am the dental hygienist and manager of the Hospital of Saint Raphael mobile dental van, Smiles 2 Go and also work part time for the Hill Health Center, the federally qualified health center in New Haven. I am writing to ask that you reconsider Governor Rell's recommended cuts to the much-needed Medicaid funding for adult dental care in the state.

I would like to take a moment to share with you the story of one of my patients seen just a few weeks ago.

"Roneisha" is a 23 year old pregnant mother of two who came to our new dental clinic located in the Pediatric department at the Hospital. The program aims to examine the teeth of very young children and educate their mothers about Early Childhood Caries, an infectious disease often transmitted from mother to child early in life through the sharing of eating utensils and food. We also preventively treat the moms to insure they are not harboring potentially harmful bacteria that could jeopardize the health of their unborn babies by causing pre-term birth or low birth weight.

"Roneisha's" teeth were scaled and polished and examined for periodontal disease. Thankfully, she did not appear to have any signs of gum problems, but her teeth were in dire need of restorative care. She presented with numerous cavities (most likely over 12; x-rays would be needed after her delivery). She had tooth pain in one which came and went, but it appeared to be restorable if taken care of soon. She had not been to a dentist in the previous two years due to her work schedule and an inability to find a dentist who would take her insurance in the area.

"Roneisha" brought with her her 4 year old daughter and her 16 month old son to be checked during her appointment. The four year old had already been to one day surgery to have stainless steel crowns placed and her 4 upper anterior teeth extracted due to severe cavities the previous year and the baby already had a chalky, white look to his four front teeth, a tell-tale sign of early tooth decay we see all too frequently in the population we treat.

While talking with her, I discovered that she had with her first child, and continued now with her 1 year old, pre-chewed her children's food. She told me she did this because she didn't always have the money for baby food and she didn't want her kids to choke on regular food. No one had previously told her not to, or that the bacteria in her mouth could be transmitted to her children and cause cavities in them.

Needless to say, she was mortified that she could have contributed to her children's development of cavities and promised to change her habits immediately. But, without this preventive appointment where we can impart this much needed information and then, non-emergent follow-up dental care, "Roneisha" will continue to harbor harmful bacteria, possibly causing her eventual tooth loss and almost certain pain in the future. And, the chances that her children, including her unborn baby, could continue to be exposed to this harmful bacteria are unfortunately great.

Please reconsider cutting off funding for adults in the Medicaid system. I see firsthand the pain and suffering my patients go through on a daily basis. We need adult Medicaid dental coverage desperately, especially in these days of high unemployment.

Thank you for taking the time to understand.

Sharon McCreven, RDH